

★ news release

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INTERIOR SECRETARY LAUDS GREAT LAKES FISHERY COMMISSION FOR FIGHT
AGAINST SEA LAMPREY

Efforts to control the sea lamprey by selective chemicals have centered around Lake Superior since Canada and the United States began the joint chemical control program in 1958. At that time some lake trout remained in Lake Superior, but commercial catches in Lakes Huron and Michigan were only a fraction of 1 percent of what they were during the 1930-39 period when about 5 million pounds were taken from each of the two lakes. Lamprey control treatments were extended recently to Lake Michigan, where the initial series will be completed by summer 1966.

Said Secretary Udall:

"The apparent success of the program in Lake Superior is most encouraging. I congratulate the Commission members on their dedication to programs to restore the Great Lakes to their rightful place as a source of revenue to commercial fishermen and a haven for sportsmen of both countries."

The sea lamprey apparently reached Lake Erie from Lake Ontario when the Welland Canal, a convenient route around Niagara Falls, was deepened between 1913 and 1918. Before then, the lamprey was believed to have been in Lake Ontario for thousands of years, but unable to enter Lake Erie because of the falls and unfavorable passage conditions before the canal was deepened.

The significance of sea lamprey in Lake Erie was not realized for some time, probably because their population was small and there was no noticeable effect on fishing. However, when sea lamprey reached Lake Huron, where conditions were more favorable, they increased rapidly and the threat to deep-water fish became apparent. Lake trout, rainbow trout, whitefish, suckers and many other species were caught with round wounds, about three quarters of an inch across, made by the numerous sharp teeth of the lamprey which fastens on its victim and feeds on its blood. Lake trout bore the brunt of the predatory attacks and catches went down first in Huron, then in Michigan, and finally in Lake Superior as the parasite multiplied in each lake.

Before the invasion of the sea lamprey, lake trout were the mainstay of a flourishing and stable fishing industry with production ranging from 14 to 17 million pounds a year in the upper Great Lakes. Fluctuation of populations made commercial fishing for other species profitable in some years, but lake trout was the backbone of the industry.

When lake trout nearly disappeared, sports fishermen and others lost a resource which had been receiving greater attention each year. In times past, thousands of outdoorsmen had spent millions of dollars annually on fishing and related hobbies in the lakes.

A realization that a united approach to the fisheries problem was desirable and necessary led to the establishment of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission by Canada and the United States in 1956. Since then, the Great Lakes States (New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin and Minnesota), the Province of Ontario, and the Governments of the United States and Canada combined efforts to control sea lampreys.

The first step was a study of the life history of the sea lamprey in the Great Lakes, its spawning habits, migrations and growth, to discover at what stage in its development it could be most easily controlled. Sea lamprey migrate up streams in the spring and early summer and spawn in holes they make in a bottom

of coarse gravel or sand. After spawning, the adults die. The eggs hatch in about 12 days, but several years pass before they leave a non-parasitic stage of life burrowed in sand and silt to migrate to the lakes and attack fish.

During the 12 to 20 months that adult sea lamprey spend in the lakes before re-entering the streams to spawn, they grow from about 7 inches to about 17 inches. Laboratory observations show that a single lamprey may destroy 30 to 40 pounds of fish during the parasitic stage.

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